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ABSTRACT

Job satisfaction has been identified as one of the most important antecedents of turnover, although it rarely accounts for more than 16% of the variance in employee withdrawal. Several data sets collected on the Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth (1978) model of turnover were reanalyzed with path analytic techniques. Data analyses revealed support for three general hypotheses, i.e., that: (1) age has an indirect effect on turnover through job satisfaction; (2) job satisfaction has an indirect effect on turnover through withdrawal cognitions; and (3) intention to quit is the immediate precursor of turnover. Although the data supported these hypotheses, inconsistencies were apparent in the data for many specific linkages proposed by Mobley et al. The findings suggest that the inconsistencies may be due to diversity of samples studies, the problem of unmeasured variables, and construct measurement problems. (Author/JAC)

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Mobley et al. Turnover Model
Reanalysis and Review of Existing Data¹

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Running head: Paths to Turnover

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Mobley et al. Turnover Model:
Reanalysis and Review of Existing Data

In investigations of organizational turnover, researchers have typically examined simple relationships between job attitudes, perceptions, and turnover. From this research, job satisfaction has been identified as one of the most important antecedents of turnover (Brayfield & Crockett, 1955; Locke, 1976; Porter & Steers, 1973; Vroom, 1964). Job satisfaction alone, however, rarely accounts for more than 16% of the variance in employee withdrawal (Locke, 1976).

Following an earlier lead of March and Simon (1958), a number of researchers recently have suggested that rather than investigating simple correlates of turnover, emphasis should be placed on the entire withdrawal process using job satisfaction as one among a number of precursors to turnover (Locke, 1968, 1976; Porter & Steers, 1973). Based on these suggestions, Mobley (1977) developed a model of the employee withdrawal decision process proposing a number of possible precursors of employee turnover. Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth (1978) presented a simplified version of this model in which job satisfaction had no direct effect on turnover, but rather affected turnover indirectly through a set of withdrawal cognitions. Specifically, the Mobley et al. simplified model was composed of eight variables: age, tenure, job satisfaction, probability of finding an acceptable alternative job, thinking of quitting, the intention to search, the intention to quit, and actual turnover. Age and tenure were combined to form a single variable. Figure 1 shows the complete Mobley et al. model.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Several empirical tests have been conducted on the Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth simplified model. The first, Mobley et al. (1978), involved 203 full-time hospital employees. To assess the direct and indirect effects of the variables in the model, a series of regression analyses were performed in which each variable in the model was regressed on the preceding variables. The standardized regression coefficients resulting from these analyses were then tested for significance. Paths between variables were eliminated if the standardized regression coefficients were not significant. The results of these regression analyses revealed a number of inconsistencies with the originally proposed simplified model. For example, probability of finding an acceptable alternative was found to relate directly to thinking of quitting but not directly to intention to search or intention to quit as originally hypothesized; job satisfaction was found not to relate significantly to intention to quit. Overall, however, the general contention of the simplified model was supported. That is, job satisfaction was found to have only indirect effects on turnover through withdrawal cognitions with intention to quit having the only direct impact on turnover.

Other investigations have been completed with similar results. Miller, Katerberg, and Hulin (1979) investigated the validity of the Mobley et al. simplified model in two National Guard samples. In a marked departure from the original model, however, Miller et al. (1979) collapsed the originally hypothesized eight variables into four categories: (1) withdrawal behavior (turnover); (2) withdrawal cognitions

(intention to quit, intention to search, thinking of quitting); (3) job satisfaction; (4) career mobility (age/tenure, probability of finding an acceptable alternative). Variables were combined into sets to increase the reliability of the measures. The data were analyzed with an R^2 change analysis. This analysis provides an estimate of the proportion of variance accounted for by each variable when entered last in the regression equation. These researchers report that job satisfaction and career mobility influenced turnover only through withdrawal cognitions. These findings held up under cross validation.

Mowday, Koberg, and McArthur (Note 1) examined the simplified model in two different samples: entry level patient care hospital employees, and clerical employees. In this study, data for age and tenure were not reported. Like the Mobley et al. (1978) study, Mowday et al. reports significant departures from the originally proposed model. Consistent with the model, however, the best predictor of turnover in both samples was intention to quit, although intention to search had an independent effect in the hospital sample. Also, as proposed by the model, in both samples satisfaction only indirectly influenced turnover through withdrawal cognitions. The results in both samples failed to cross-validate.

In a final test of the Mobley et al. simplified turnover model, Coverdale and Terborg (Note 2) examined all variables (age and tenure separately) in a sample of 65 clerical employees of a large university. Like the other studies, the simplified model as outlined by Mobley et al. was not supported, although the finding that satisfaction affects turnover through withdrawal cognitions was.

Based on the research completed thus far, the Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth simplified turnover model correctly specifies some aspects of the turnover process. In each sample, satisfaction was found to have only an indirect effect on turnover through withdrawal cognitions. This same research indicates, however, that many of the paths proposed by the simplified model do not hold up in all research settings.

At this juncture it would be advantageous to assess which paths consistently exist across studies and samples. Such an assessment could help further clarify the satisfaction withdrawal cognition turnover process as defined by the variables in the model, and perhaps suggest future research directions for further investigations in this area. It is the purpose of the present paper to conduct such an assessment. However, it would not be most advantageous to proceed with the research as it is currently presented. Mobley et al. (1978) proposed an eight variable model of turnover, but the relationships among these variables were not examined in a similar fashion in all studies. Age and tenure, for example, were studied together by Mobley et al. (1978), combined with probability of finding an acceptable alternative by Miller et al. (1979), examined separately by Coverdale and Terborg (Note 2) and not reported at all in the Mowday et al. (Note 1) study. Further, Miller et al. (1979) combined the data into four sets and examined the extent to which the sets of variables explained variance in turnover beyond that accounted for by the other variables. Using the data in its present form, it would be impossible to compare all the paths hypothesized by Mobley et al. in all the samples.

To complicate matters further, the analyses used in the studies

presented above do not take into account the causal system, in its entirety. By examining a causal model one equation at a time, the question of how well the reduced model (model with nonsignificant paths removed) fits the data remains unanswered (Specht, 1975). In the studies presented above, none of the researchers examined the goodness of fit of their reduced model to the data. This can lead to what Specht (1975) calls internal specification errors; the inclusion of a path which should not be included, or the omission of a path which should be included.

Because of the differential treatment of the originally hypothesized variables and the failure to take the goodness of fit of the causal system into account, a review of the Mobley, Horner, Hollingsworth simplified turnover model based on the data as it is currently presented would provide an incomplete assessment of the model, and may produce some erroneous conclusions. However, while each study dealt with a variation of the originally hypothesized variables, data from each of the six samples were collected on all eight variables discussed in the simplified model. It is the purpose of the present study to review the Mobley et al. (1978) model by reanalyzing the data with path analytic techniques and associated tests of goodness of fit (Specht, 1975) including all eight variables for each sample. By reanalyzing these data it will be possible to avoid the problems discussed above. Internal specification errors can be eliminated, and the significant paths in the six data sets can be examined. By making the data sets more comparable through a common analytical procedure, a more complete review and evaluation of the originally hypothesized model will be possible.

Method

Correlation matrices were used in all subsequent analyses. For the most part, the matrices were obtained from the original articles. However, additional data were requested and supplied by Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth; and Mowday, Koberg, and McArthur.

Samples

The data reported in subsequent analyses were based on the following samples:

(1) Mobley et al. (1978): Hospital employees ($N = 203$) in service, technical, clerical and nursing services positions.

(2) Miller et al. (1979): Sample 1, National Guard members ($N = 235$) from 29 geographically dispersed units.

Sample 2, National Guard members ($N = 225$) from the same units as above.

(3) Mowday et al. (Note 1): Sample 1, Hospital employees in entry level patient care positions ($N = 267$). Sample 2, Entry level clerical and administrative staff ($N = 302$).

(4) Coverdale and Terborg (Note 2): Clerical employees ($N = 65$).

Measures

Tenure, age, job satisfaction, probability of finding an acceptable alternative job, thinking of quitting, intention to search, intention to quit, and the final decision to quit were measured in all studies. Satisfaction was measured with different instruments in each study. Measures included: the Brayfield-Rothe (1951) Index of Job Satisfaction (used by Mobley et al., 1978); the Job Descriptive Index, (Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969) work scale (used by Miller et al., 1979); a three item

measure of overall satisfaction (Nadler, 1975) from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Package (used by Mowday et al., Note 1); and the Hoppock scale (1935) (used by Coverdale & Terborg, Note 2). One item measures were used in all studies to assess probability of finding an acceptable alternative, thinking of quitting, intention to search, and intention to quit. Items used to assess these variables differed somewhat from study to study. For example, intention to quit was measured by Mowday et al. (Note 1) by asking employees to estimate how much longer they intended to work for the agency; Coverdale and Terborg (Note 2) addressed intention to quit by asking "What are the chances that you will quit your present job and leave ____?" For a more complete description of these items; see the original studies. Finally, the turnover period also varied. The following turnover periods were used: (1) Mobley et al. (1978), 47 weeks; (2) Miller et al. (1979), six months; (3) Mowday et al. (Note 1), one year; (4) Coverdale and Terborg (Note 2), three months.

Results

Multicollinearity is said to exist if the variance of one independent variable in a regression equation is largely accounted for by a linear combination of the remaining independent variables. One consequence of multicollinearity may be highly unreliable path coefficients, a situation that can lead to specifications errors in a path model. Consequently, the data in each of the six samples were checked for multicollinearity using a procedure described by Kenny (1979, p. 66). The Mowday et al. (Note 1) Hospital sample was found to have severe multicollinearity problems. This sample was dropped from subsequent analyses.

For each of the remaining five samples, an exploratory path analysis

was performed in which each variable in the model was regressed on the preceding variables.² Standardized regression coefficients resulting from these regressions were tested for significance using t-tests. Paths in the model with coefficients significant at the $p \leq .05$ level were retained. All nonsignificant paths were dropped from the model.³ The final reduced model (model with all nonsignificant paths removed) was used to produce a theoretical correlation matrix using the principles outlined by Kerlinger and Pedhazur (1973, p. 318-321). The difference between the observed correlation matrix based on the fully recursive model (model with all paths) and the theoretical correlation matrix (produced from the reduced path model) was used to produce a matrix of residuals. The residual correlation matrix was then tested for internal specification errors as outlined by Specht (1975). This test provides information on significant departures of the theoretical correlation matrix from the observed correlation matrix. Significant departures indicate that an internal specification error exists.

The exploratory path analysis of the Miller et al. (1979) National Guard sample ($N = 225$) was found to contain an internal specification error. A rather large residual was found in the matrix of residuals between probability of finding an alternative job and turnover. A causal path between these two variables was added to the model. The test for internal specification errors was repeated for the new model, and no indication of an internal specification error was found. A second statistical test described by Specht (1975) was conducted to determine whether the model with the path from probability of finding an alternative to turnover fit the data significantly better than the model without this path. The results of

this test indicated that the model with the extra path was a significantly better fit to the data.

Presented in Table 1 are the five sets of path coefficients derived from the five correlation matrices. The five sets of path coefficients represent systems with no internal specification errors as indicated by the significance test outlined by Specht (1975). In this table, the symbol $P(j,i)$ refers to the path coefficient with the causal arrow going from variable i to variable j .

 Insert Table 1 about here

The data in Table 1 were used to examine the Mobley et al. model more closely. A path was considered to be consistent if it was found to be significant and had the same sign in four or five of the samples. Paths which appeared with the same sign in three of the five samples were considered to be weaker, but still noteworthy. Figure 2 summarizes these findings in a diagram.

 Insert Figure 2 about here

Of the 12 paths hypothesized in the Mobley et al (1978) model, six received support as defined by the criteria set in the present study. These were: (1) age $\rightarrow$ job satisfaction; (2) job satisfaction $\rightarrow$ thinking of quitting; (3) thinking of quitting $\rightarrow$ intention to search; (4) intention to search $\rightarrow$ intention to quit; (5) job satisfaction $\rightarrow$ intention to quit; (6) intention to quit $\rightarrow$ turnover. Two paths not hypothe-

sized by Mobley et al. also received support in the data; these paths were: age $\rightarrow$ thinking of quitting, and thinking of quitting $\rightarrow$ intention to quit.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to reanalyze the available data collected on the Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth model of turnover using path analysis procedures and appropriate tests of goodness of fit (Specht, 1975). The Miller et al. National Guard sample ($N = 225$) points up the advantage of employing the path analysis procedures and the goodness of fit tests over simply interpreting a series of regression equations as typically has been done in the literature to date. All the multiple R-values and standardized regression coefficients calculated in the exploratory path analysis of the Miller et al. National Guard data ($N = 225$) were significant. However, as indicated by the significance test for internal specification errors, this system as a whole did not fit the data, i.e., did not account for the observed set of correlations. Simply interpreting the series of multiple regressions would have lead to ignoring a path which was necessary to complete the system. Since the intent of the research on the Mobley et al. turnover model is to examine how the variables operate as a system, the use of path analyses and the significance tests described by Specht is most appropriate.

There are obvious and important differences between the original model proposed by Mobley et al. (1978) and the summary diagram pictured in Figure 2. The variables of tenure and probability of finding an acceptable alternative were dropped from the summary diagram because there was no consistent causal path linking either variable with turnover. Mobley et al. also proposed a direct effect of job satisfaction on

intention to search, but this linkage was not supported by the summary data. In addition, the data did indicate the existence of several causal paths not originally proposed by Mobley et al. These include the direct effect of age on thinking of quitting, and the direct effect of thinking of quitting on intention to quit.

The summary diagram does support the originally hypothesized causal chain consisting of age $\rightarrow$ job satisfaction $\rightarrow$ thinking of quitting $\rightarrow$ intention to search $\rightarrow$ intention to quit $\rightarrow$ turnover. This causal chain is obviously robust since it held up across various measures of job satisfaction and withdrawal cognitions, and across samples as diverse as the hospital employees and the National Guard. This causal chain supports three general hypotheses proposed by Mobley et al. (1978). The hypotheses are: (1) that age has an indirect effect on turnover through job satisfaction; (2) that job satisfaction has an indirect effect on turnover through the withdrawal cognitions; (3) that intention to quit is the immediate precursor of turnover.

Although these three general hypotheses proposed by Mobley et al. were supported consistently by the data, the fact remains that many specific paths proposed by Mobley et al. (1978) were not. Further, the five sets of path coefficients in Table 1 varied noticeably.

Several reasons may exist for these apparent inconsistencies. One reason may be the diversity in the samples studied. It is very plausible that a single model of turnover is not appropriate for populations as different as those examined here. For example, the two samples where intention to search did not impact on intention to quit were both National Guard samples. The National Guard is a part-time job. Furthermore, the

reasons for joining the Guard probably are not strictly financial. For example, being in the Guard may satisfy a need to serve the country, or may satisfy obligatory service. Other jobs may not serve the same function for the individual. The subjects in the National Guard samples may not have been as concerned about finding another job after leaving the service as would the subjects in the full-time samples. In this case it is reasonable to expect that their intention to search may not affect their intention to quit. Additionally, although intention to quit was the only variable which consistently had a direct effect on turnover, thinking of quitting also had a significant impact on turnover in both National Guard samples. Again, because the subjects in the National Guard may not have been as concerned about finding another job after leaving the Guard, thinking of quitting simply may not have been an indirect precursor to turnover through intention to search, but rather a direct influence on turnover. Thus, the appearance of this path also may have been due to sample characteristics.

Whether a particular model of turnover generalizes across specific groups such as part-time and full-time employees, upper management and line employees, or male and female employees, is a question of central importance. The question can be answered by first cross validating a particular model within a specific employee category. When this kind of generalization has been established, then cross validation can be attempted across different employee categories. The differences in path models discussed in this study highlights the need for this type of research in the turnover area.

A second possible explanation for the inconsistency of the path co-

efficients may lie in the unmeasured variables problem raised by Billings and Wroten (1978), and James (1980). Failure to consider potential correlates of variables in a given system may lead to biased estimates of path coefficients, i.e., overestimates or underestimates of path coefficients. According to James (1980), unmeasured variables pose a problem in the estimation of path coefficients when: "(a) at least one unmeasured major/moderate cause exists for the endogenous variable of interest, (b) the unmeasured cause is correlated at least moderately with one or more of the measured causes, and (c) the unmeasured cause is neither redundant with one of the measured causes nor linearly dependent on some combination of the measured causes" (p. 420). Several variables not included in the Mobley et al. (1978) model may have lead to the presence of the unmeasured variables problem, and to biased estimates of path coefficients. Examples of such unmeasured variables include: (1) organizational mobility, which is the extent to which an employee feels that his/her career is tied to the organization; (2) expected utility of present job, which is the expectancy that the present job will lead to future attainment of various positively or negatively valued outcomes (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, Meglino, 1979); (3) attraction of alternatives, which is the expectancy that alternate jobs will lead to future attainment of various positively and negatively valued outcomes (Mobley et al., 1979); (4) congruence, which is defined as the congruence between individual and organizational goals and values (Mobley et al., 1979).

Consider the endogenous variable of probability of finding an acceptable alternative in the Mobley et al. (1978) model. This endogenous variable conceivably could be correlated with the unmeasured variables

of organizational mobility, expected utility of present job, and attraction of alternatives. Furthermore, these three unmeasured variables may be correlated with age (the hypothesized precursor to probability of finding an acceptable alternative), yet these variables are probably not completely redundant with the variance in age. Such a situation could lead to an unmeasured variables problem.

Similarly, consider the withdrawal cognitions. The four unmeasured variables of organizational mobility, expected utility of present job, attraction of alternatives, and congruence may all be related to the withdrawal cognitions. Also, these unmeasured variables may be correlated with age, job satisfaction, and probability of finding an acceptable alternative (potential precursors of the withdrawal cognitions) and may not be completely redundant with these variables. Incorporating the four unmeasured variables into the Mobley et al. (1978) model may reduce possible bias and inconsistency in the estimation of path coefficients.

A third major reason for the inconsistencies in the data may be the diversity of the measures used to assess the withdrawal cognitions and job satisfaction. The different measures used in the studies may not have been tapping identical underlying constructs. This situation can be thought of as a convergent validity problem.

On the other hand, perhaps the inconsistencies are a result of a discriminant validity problem. Perhaps tenure and age are really overlapping indicators of the same underlying construct, with age being the more reliable indicator of that construct. If so, the resulting multicollinearity, even though not great enough to meet the previously employed criterion for rejection, could cause the inconsistent findings that were

obtained for tenure (see Gordon, 1968). This problem is sometimes referred to as a lack of discriminant validity. Another possibility, however, is that age and tenure are tapping different latent variables that are differentially related to the other variables in the turnover model.

The causal modeling approach described by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1978) provides a solution to the convergent and discriminant validity problems discussed above. These authors describe a computer program called Linear Structural Relations (LISREL) that has clear advantages over the more traditional path analytic techniques. LISREL involves a two stage approach to causal modeling. The first stage uses confirmatory factor analysis to define underlying constructs or latent variables. In contrast to path analysis, there is no assumption that a variable is measured without error nor that just one measure of each variable is included in the model. The logic of factor analysis enables the researcher to employ multiple measures, when necessary, of an underlying construct. In research on the turnover process, for example, this would allow the researcher to use multiple measures of job satisfaction and of withdrawal cognitions. The second stage of LISREL uses maximum likelihood procedures to estimate the structural parameters (analogous to path coefficients) for the model. The user obtains two kinds of output. One is a measurement model specifying the relations among the measures of each latent variable. The other is a structural or causal model specifying the relations among the latent variables. LISREL may also be used to minimize problems resulting from the omission of variables in a causal model. Maruyama and McGarvey (1980) present a general overview of the LISREL approach.

As a final note, in future research, more attention should be given

to the direct and indirect influences of variables on intention to quit as opposed to the actual act of turnover. From the employer's standpoint, intention to quit may be a more important variable than the actual act of turnover (Martin & Hunt, 1980). If the precursors to intention to quit were better understood, the employer could possibly institute changes to affect this intention. However, once an employee has quit, there is little the employer can do except assume the expense of hiring or training another employee.

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Footnotes

² Because multicollinearity was not found in any of the five samples, age and tenure were not combined as in the original Mobley et al. (1978) study but used as separate exogenous variables.

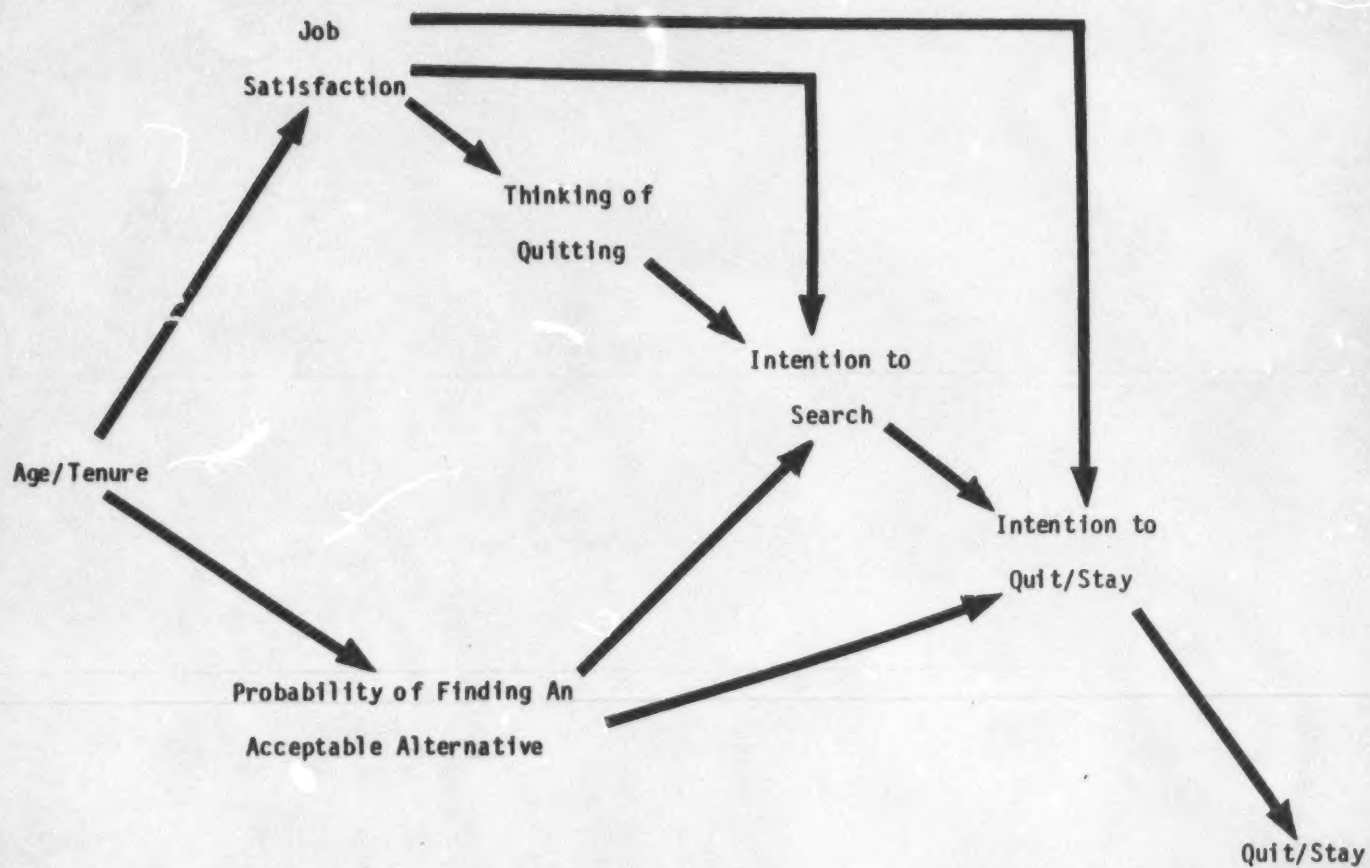
³ Although not hypothesized by Mobley et al. (1978), the possibility of a path existing between satisfaction and the probability of finding an acceptable alternative job was evident in some models. Analyses were conducted examining the two possible directions of this path. Smaller residuals resulted with the path going from satisfaction to probability of an acceptable alternative and this order was used in all subsequent analyses.

Table 1

Path Coefficients for the Five Samples

	Mobley et al. (1978) N=203 Hospital Emp.	Miller et al. (1979) N=235 National Guard	Miller et al. (1979) N=225 National Guard	Coverdale & Terborg (1980) Clerical N=65	Mowday et al. (1980) N=286 Clerical
r ₁₂	.59	.55	.19	.54	.40
p (3,1) *	.35	-.21	-.29		
p (3,2) *		.37	.31	.28	.25
p (4,1) *					
p (4,2) *	-.20				-.13
p (4,3)		-.27	-.29	-.33	.23
p (5,1)	.17	.19			
p (5,2)	-.22	-.36	-.13		
p (5,3) *	-.54	-.59	-.62	-.47	-.42
p (5,4)		-.17	.10	.40	
p (6,1)					
p (6,2)	-.17				-.20
p (6,3) *	-.26				...
p (6,4) *					
p (6,5) *	.43	.25	.27	.70	.25
p (7,1)	-.15				
p (7,2)		-.28			.58
p (7,3) *		-.19	-.12		-.34
p (7,4) *		-.13	.10		.15
p (7,5)	.14	.44	.67	.28	.09
p (7,6) *	.58			.65	.55
p (8,1)					
p (8,2)					-.27
p (8,3)		.16			
p (8,4)		.21	.12		
p (8,5)		.24	.36		
p (8,6)		.11			
p (8,7) *	.49	.61	.34	.39	.18

Note. 1 = Tenure; 2 = Age; 3 = Job Satisfaction; 4 = Probability of finding an acceptable alternative; 5 = Thinking of Quitting; 6 = Intention to Search; 7 = Intention to Quit; 8 = Turnover; *Path hypothesized by Mobley et al. (1978). Note: path coefficients were generated from the available matrices containing correlations reported at two decimal places. Thus, the path coefficients are only approximate in value.



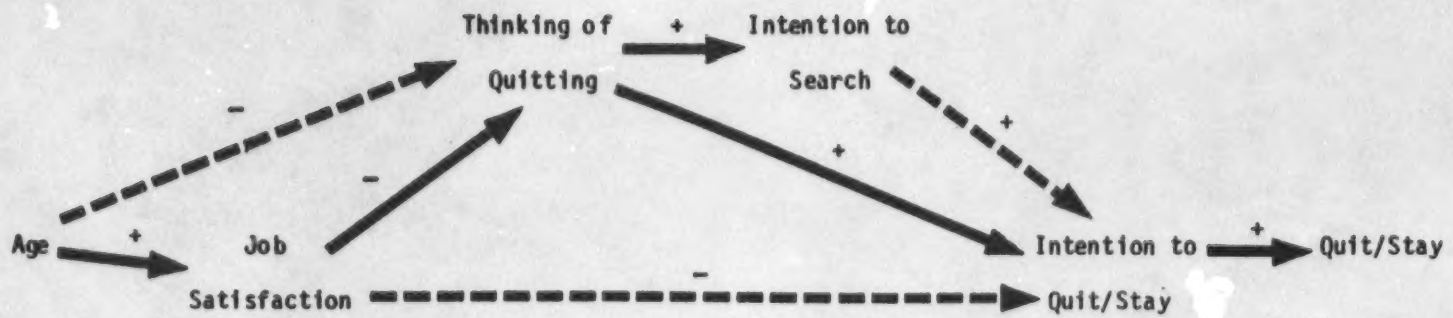


Figure Caption

Figure 1. Mobley, Horner, Hollingsworth (1978) model of turnover.

Note. From "An evaluation of precursors of hospital employee turnover" by W. H. Mobley, S. O. Horner, and A. T. Hollingsworth, Journal of Applied Psychology, 1978, 63, 408-414. Copyright 1978 by the American Psychological Association, Inc.

Figure 2. Summary diagram based on the reanalysis of existing data on the Mobley, Horner, Hollingsworth turnover model.

Note. The solid arrows indicate paths that were significant and consistent in sign for at least four of the five samples. The dashed arrows indicate path coefficients that were significant and consistent in sign in three of the five samples.